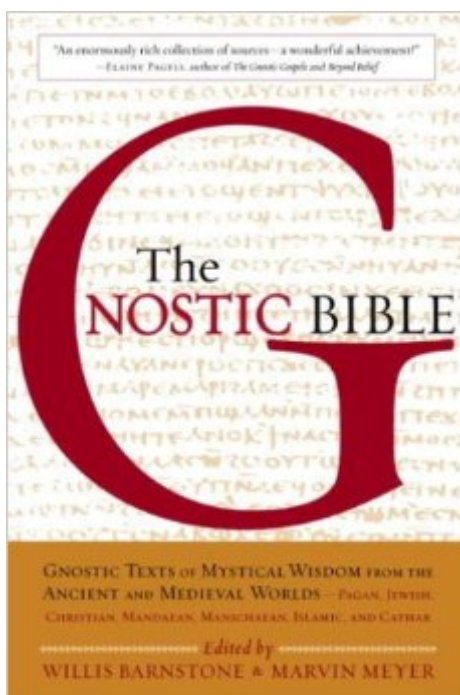


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The Gnostic Bible: Gnostic Texts Of Mystical Wisdom From The Ancient And Medieval Worlds



Synopsis

Gnosticism was a wide-ranging religious movement of the first millennium CE "with earlier antecedents and later flourishings" whose adherents sought salvation through knowledge and personal religious experience. Gnostic writings offer striking perspectives on both early Christian and non-Christian thought. For example, some gnostic texts suggest that god should be celebrated as both mother and father, and that self-knowledge is the supreme path to the divine. Only in the past fifty years has it become clear how far the gnostic influence spread in ancient and medieval religions "and what a marvelous body of scriptures it produced. This is the first time that such a rich and diverse collection of gnostic texts have been brought together in a single volume, in translations that allow the spirit of the original texts to shine. The selections gathered here, in poetic, readable translation, represent Jewish, Christian, Hermetic, Mandaean, Manichaean, Islamic, and Cathar expressions of gnostic spirituality. Their regions of origin include Egypt, the Greco-Roman world, the Middle East, Syria, Iraq, China, and France. Also included are introductions, notes, an extensive glossary, and a wealth of suggestions for further reading.

Book Information

Hardcover: 880 pages

Publisher: Shambhala; 1 edition (December 2, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1570622426

ISBN-13: 978-1570622427

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 2.1 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 3 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (61 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #128,077 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology > Gnosticism](#) #2789 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Theology](#)

Customer Reviews

This is a fascinating volume. I have heard of the gnostic teachings over the years, but never realized that they were so widespread nor so diverse. These teachings extended in space from western China all the way to the Languedoc in southwestern France, and in time from before Christ until the Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars in the thirteenth century. It is interesting to note that, as Willis Barnstone states in his Epilogue, "(in) its territorial range, in its cultural multiplicity, no religion

has been so internationally receptive as has gnosticism." In comparison, orthodox Christianity and Islam, while they now have a greater reach geographically, attained much of their extension through conquest. From Marvin Meyer's Introduction and Willis Barnstone's Epilogue, both models of clear, accessible scholarship, one learns the reason why the gnostic teachings were so hated by the orthodoxies, especially in Christianity. The gnostic views ran so counter to the orthodox view that they represented a real theological threat to orthodox believers. It is no surprise that the early church set out to systematically destroy its major theological rival once Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire with Constantine's conversion in 313. Despite the apparent logic of such a protective action, it is reprehensible nonetheless, equal in proportion to the later destruction of Mayan codices and other Pre-Columbian sacred texts by the Spanish in the Americas. I am not Christian, Jewish or Muslim, but I am intensely interested in mystical literature and in the mystical experience. After having initially read the beginning introductions, the epilogue and a bare smattering of the different entries, I can see how these teachings have exerted their influence through the writings of the major Christian, Jewish and Islamic mystics. Though these mystics often cloaked their teachings in the language of orthodoxy, and were persecuted nonetheless, their message has always come through to those dissatisfied with the strictures imposed by orthodox teachings. The gnostic principle of the individual's ability to achieve direct union with God without the intermediaries of church hierarchy has run like an underground aquifer through the centuries. With this volume, and the many others written in the last half-century at least, this underground source is once again coming to light. Its refreshing and revivifying message offers hope to those of us tired of the reigning orthodoxies with their increasing rigidity, exclusionary tactics and propensity toward fundamentalist, sectarian violence. There is also the artistic beauty of these texts to consider, along with their historical, cultural, spiritual and theological implications. We are lucky to have Willis Barnstone, one of our master translators and poets, rendering many of these writings into lucid, rapturous verse and prose. His essay, "Letting in the Light: Translating Holy Texts," argues convincingly for translations that convey not only the sacred wisdom of the texts but also their literary beauty. Being an ardent admirer of Mr. Barnstone's work, I have complete faith in the quality and tone of the translations here, which is a good thing, because I doubt I will ever learn the original languages. I am also looking forward to reading Marvin Meyer's translations, with which I am not yet familiar, as well as all the introductions for each specific category of gnostic literature. For one of the uninitiated like me, I can't think of a better introductory text. This is definitely a book to study, re-read and cherish.

This is truly a complete Bible for the Gnostics. It contains every major writing that is considered Gnostic. It includes both ancient and medieval writings. The writings are gathered from all religious branches of Gnostics: Pagan, Jewish, Christian, Mandaean, Manichaean, Islamic and Cathar. Within this volume we have early wisdom Gospels such as Thomas and even the biblical John, there is Sethian, Valentian, Syrian, and Hermetic Literature. This is a great volume to use in referencing the original works as you read about them. I read this entire volume through from front to back when I had just begun studying Gnosticism and had a hard time comprehending it. Some of the writings are hard to understand without a full understanding of what the writer was trying to teach. For example the book *Thunder* teaches nondualism but makes no sense without this understanding. While I believe the Gospels of Philip and Thomas are very easy to understand. This volume contains almost the entire Nag Hammadi text and so many other texts, it is like one stop shopping for all the texts you will need in your studies. If you are interested in Gnosticism this "Bible" should be in your reference library.

The Gnostic Bible: Gnostic Texts of Mystical Wisdom from the Ancient and Medieval Worlds edited by Willis Barnstone, Marvin Meyer (Shambhala) (Paperback) this anthology is by far the most poetic and generally accessible anthology of gnostic texts to be assembled. It utilizes the strengths of both editors. Barnstone has dealt with some of this material before in his 20 year-old *The Other Bible*. This new selection concentrates more on gnosticism and less on other biblical pseudepigrapha, early Kabbalah, haggadah, midrash, christian apocrypha. Comparing where there is overlap Barnstone has offers some crisp poetic renderings in this new volume rather than the more technically dry academic copy present in some selection in the *The Other Bible*. Touches of Barnes fine literary sense shine forth here and there in *The Gnostic Bible*. Marvin Meyer is best known for his generally accessible accounts of classic religions and popular magic during the rise of Christianity. His *Ancient Christian Magic* and *The Ancient Mysteries* provide useful entrance into current debates by religious scholars and historians. Both editors well serve their popular audience in this anthology and though the texts themselves may baffle and frustrate, they also can inspire to see how creative and varied salvific knowledge was conceived.

Collaboratively compiled and expertly co-edited by Willis Barnstone (Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature, Indiana University) and Marvin Meyer (Griset Professor of Bible and Christian Studies, Chapman University, Orange, California), *The Gnostic Bible: Gnostic Texts Of Mystical Wisdom From The Ancient And Medieval Worlds* is an 880-page collection of Jewish,

Christian, Hermetic, Mandaeen, Manichaeen, Islamic, and Cathar writings concerning gnostic spirituality. Offering a veritable wealth of diverse sources, all of which are in full keeping with the Gnostic movement (and its promotion of salvation through knowledge and personal religious experience), The Gnostic Bible is a comprehensive, profoundly spiritual, and exceptionally accessible literary text, which is specifically translated in a manner that is designed to be clear and accessible to scholars, students, and non-specialist general readers of all backgrounds. No personal or academic Gnostic Studies collection can be considered truly comprehensive without the inclusion of this Shambhala edition of The Gnostic Bible.

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